

Come and Worship!  
Reclaiming the Holiness of Christmas  
Psalm 96 and selected NT texts  
KSBC 12/19/10

**Intro** It was without a doubt an unusual day for Mary. She found herself greatly troubled, afraid, with a lot of questions . . . talking to an angel. Our scripture reading this morning from Luke 1 teaches us that God sent the angel Gabriel to this favored young woman who was legally pledged to be married to Joseph. Mary's world was rocked as she listened, saw and reflected on the words of the angel from God. She would conceive a child with the help of the Holy Spirit . . . she would bear a son, name him Jesus and he would be both God and man. Gabriel explains that all this will happen by the power of God.

Mary responds with humble submission to God's words and power expressed through the angel to her. Luke's account tells us that in the weeks after the angel appeared that Mary visited Elizabeth who confirmed to Mary that what was happening in her body was from the Lord, Mary was blessed and her baby would be very special.

The days and weeks of rehearsing and reflecting on the life changing words and message of Gabriel from God, now being affirmed by highly respected Elizabeth explode in a song of praise from Mary's heart and mouth that begins with the words . . . *My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior(1:46-47)*. Of all the possible responses that could or should be welling up within her at this sudden hijacking of her life, after reflection on what she saw and heard from God, her response was an intensely personal one. Her soul declares that God is great (magnify)! Everything in her wanted to be sure God was seen as triple X large.

Mary teaches us that the antidote to excessive and shallow Christmas merriment is not a 'scrooge like' protest or even an extended lament against commercialism . . . the antidote is worship! The truth that you and I were made to find our greatest joy in making God large and declaring that he is great is seen in this simple response of worship by Mary. Her well planned marriage to and life with a carpenter had just been set in the context of a higher value . . . the greatness of God.

You have to wonder if Mary's heart had not been shaped in her developing years by hearing and reflecting on the words of the Psalmist . . .

34:2-3 *My soul makes its boast in the LORD; let the humble hear and be glad.  
Oh, magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt his name together!*

40:16 *But may all who seek you rejoice and be glad in you;  
may those who love your salvation say continually, "Great is the LORD!"*

70:4 *May all who seek you rejoice and be glad in you!  
May those who love your salvation say evermore, "God is great!"*

Following Mary's lead, our desire over these Sundays surrounding December 25<sup>th</sup> is to organize, train and motivate a rebellion of worship by God's people that will draw the attention of many to the glory, holiness and authority of our God as they are displayed in the coming, birth and person of Jesus Christ.

Worship involves you seeing, hearing and reflecting on what God has revealed in Christ and in Scripture and then responding with your whole person to who he is and what he has done.

We turn our attention to the command found in Psalm 96:9 with the intention of learning how to ‘worship the LORD in the splendor of holiness.’ The splendor of holiness is simply the expressions of God’s holiness. It may be helpful to picture holiness as the clothing that God wears and we are to adjust our response according to his holy attire. The primary meaning of holiness is to be set apart, unique, as RC Sproul defines it . . . a transcendent otherness. A secondary meaning of holiness is purity, rightness or perfection. Our response of worship is to be energized and shaped by the holiness of God.

Today, our objective is to stimulate and equip you to reclaim the holiness of the Christmas story. We will do this in two steps. First, we will look at the scriptures to see and reflect on the simple truth that Jesus Christ is holy and a glimpse of what that means. Second, we will turn to the Psalmist for specific and practical coaching on how we can authentically respond to this truth in worship.

**1. See, hear and reflect . . .**

*reclaiming the holiness of Christmas*

*God’s holiness (set apartness; uniqueness; transcendence) is seen in both the identity and authority of His Son Jesus Christ.*

Reflect on two passages that teach us about the ‘transcendent otherness’ of Jesus Christ.

**Luke 1:35**      identity . . . *therefore the child to born will be called holy – the Son of God.*

This passage teaches that the divine conception (human/divine in one person) results in two terms applied to/being true about Jesus Christ:

Holy - unique, set apart, divine

Son of God – is from God and is God

These terms together explain the mysterious and unique truth of the God man. No other truth about Christ is as wonderful or challenging as this one . . . God became a man. The atonement, the resurrection, the virgin birth and Jesus miracles all cause wonder and challenge the human understanding, but God uniting the divine and human nature in one person is a cut above all of those in it’s splendor.

**Jesus was God**                      same essence or substance                      Lk. 1:31; 2:11

John 1:1-5 several claims/statements                      1:14 claim – word became flesh

**Jesus was man**                      truly human, born of a woman                      Lk. 1:31

Heb. 2:17-18                      Phil. 2:6-8                      Col. 2:9; 1:19

Packer/Knowing God/p59                      2Cor.8:9

*Here is stated not the fact of the Incarnation only, but also its meaning; the taking of manhood by the Son is set before us in a way which shows us how we should ever view it – not simply a marvel of nature, but rather as a wonder of grace.*

**John 6:60-71**

authority . . . *you are the holy one of God*

This passage records two responses of those who have been listening to Jesus teaching about his being the bread of life. Note the flow of the story leading up to Peter’s response in verse 68-69.

60-63	Harsh/offensive teaching	ascend back to Father via cross & flesh counts nothing – words are Spirit and life
64-66	Decisive abandonment	some do not believe
67	Pointed question	challenge – why do you stay?
68-69	Revealing response	alternatives? Know and believe you are . . . The holy one of God . . . no one like you . . . you demand a response like no other
	Mark 4:40-41	What kind of man is this?
	Luke 5:8	Please go away, leave me alone . . . I am a sinful man.
	Mark 1:24	astonished and amazed
	Isa. 6:5	woe is me, I am undone/lost

Jesus Christ is unique and amazing in his authority . . . there is no one like him . . . he is the transcendent, one of a kind sent from God.

**2. Authentically respond . . . worship the LORD in the splendor of holiness. Psa 96:7-9**

What type of response do these truths generate inside you? Look at Psalm 96 for both a model and some coaching on how you can respond authentically to God. In the words of the Psalmist, let’s learn how to worship ‘in the splendor of holiness.’ The truth about God’s uniqueness and otherness as seen in Christ invites and demands a response.

**2 ways of worship response motivated by God’s holiness . . .**

Express your amazement and awe at the transcendence of God . . .

- Give to God. Ascribe 3x enlists mind . . . heart, head & voice to declare God’s greatness  
Psa. 29:1-2 ‘God is great’ Psa 34:3, 40:16
- Give God credit 96:7-8 angels of Isa. 6:1-3  
Give God an offering 96:8 come to God to give rather than get
- Submit to God. Worship; tremble enlists the will to humble/submit oneself  
Psa. 95:6 Gen. 23:7, 12

Get low before God – humble yourself in his presence.  
Accept grace submissively/obediently – here I am Lord, send me Isa. 6:8

The truth about God invites and demands a response. How can you adjust your response to God's holiness . . . like Mary be a reflector and advocate of God's unique and holy character?

1. You must have a time, place and plan to spend with God to hear and see him in his Word. Psa 119:7

God's glory and holiness are splendid. God is great. These are more than words, they are truth.

2. You must intentionally determine to give to God rather than take/expect from him.

Giving God credit in a way that is both truthful and genuine – continually say 'Great is the Lord'

3. You must regularly reestablish that healthy distance between you and God.

Humbling yourself means a fresh vision of God's holiness and glory.

A saving faith in Christ begins by acknowledging God's unique perfections and your complete sinfulness. It is in fact crying out . . . I am in impossible trouble, I am undone, I do not have it all together, I am unclean. Only then can God come to you with the necessary grace to cleanse and forgive you.

### Study Questions

1. Review and evaluate the following description of worship . . . . *Worship involves you seeing, hearing and reflecting on what God has revealed in Christ and in Scripture and then responding with your whole person to who he is and what he has done.* Observations? Strengths? Weaknesses? Helpful? Why?

2. Read Psalm 96:7-9. Observe and share repeated terms or concepts that appear to establish a theme for these verses.

3. Review Isaiah 6:1-8. Share some observations that help you understand this meeting between a holy God and the prophet. What are some of the terms used in the sermon to define holiness? Which do you find most helpful? Why?

4. Review these NT passages and share how they contribute to a better appreciation of the union of God and man in the person of Jesus Christ.

Heb. 2:17-18

Phil. 2:6-8

Col. 2:9; 1:19

2Cor.8:9

5. Reflect on Peter's reply in John 6:68-69. What did he mean by saying 'you are the holy one of God?'

6. Have group members share practical ways that they give God credit in their daily lives for his uniqueness and transcendence. Have group members share experience of not giving God credit or regularly humbling themselves before God . . . why does this happen?

7. What do you want to do, use or remember from today's study of God's word?